CASE STUDIES

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What did you study at university?

I was interested in aspects of both biology and chemistry, which led me to do an undergraduate Masters degree in Biochemistry (MBiochem) at Oxford University. During my degree, I did two summer projects: one in the biochemistry department, and one in the local hospital. It was at the hospital that I saw the importance of biochemistry in a clinical setting. At a careers fair, I came across the NHS stand and discovered clinical science.

What did you do after university?

Clinical science appealed to me as it was a good mix of biochemistry and medicine. I applied for the NHS training scheme, which attracts people from different subjects and at different career stages. I received training over three years at Southampton General Hospital, which included a funded Masters. I became interested in metabolic biochemistry and applied for more senior positions.

What are the main duties of your role?

The main duties of my role are to run tests on patient samples, ensure machines are functioning accurately and interpret the result into a helpful answer for medical staff. Without clinical scientists, the majority of diagnoses could not be made. In addition to processing samples, I answer doctor's questions, keep up to date with the latest scientific breakthroughs, and develop new techniques for testing samples.

What skills are needed, other than scientific knowledge, to do the job?

Organisational skills are required as you will be doing different tasks and projects simultaneously, and you need to prioritise patient samples. Communication skills are important as you will be talking to medical staff, scientists and patients, and not everyone will be experienced in your area of science.. Good presentation skills are important, as we give presentations to a wide range of people, including those from different departments.

What are your favourite aspects of the job?

My favourite aspect of the job is the day-to-day variation, including an ideal mix of computer work and interpretation with practical laboratory work, and the fact that you are always learning something new. Also there is a clearly defined career path for a clinical scientist. You do the initial training and work your way up the career ladder to senior and principal posts. You can also choose to take exams, which will also you to progress further.

What aspects of the job do you enjoy least?

The job is very demanding, and funding cuts, staff shortages and increasing workloads means that there is rarely a quiet day.

Do you have any advice for someone wishing to enter your career area?

I would advise anyone looking to apply for the NHS Clinical Scientist training programme to look around hospital labs, talk to Clinical Scientists, and find out exactly what the job is and what it entails – it is very important to demonstrate an understanding of what Clinical Biochemistry actually is. Work experience in a lab is great but not essential as it can be very difficult to organise.

What is biochemistry?

Biochemistry is the branch of science that explores the chemical processes that take place inside all living things, from bacteria to plants and animals. It is a laboratory-based science that brings together biology and chemistry, by using chemical knowledge and techniques to help understand and solve biological problems.

Clinical scientist: run tests on samples to help healthcare professionals to make a diagnosis and provide treatment.

Metabolic Biochemistry: the study of the chemical reactions that release energy and synthesise molecules within cells.

Further information

Job profile of a clinical scientist:
http://bit.ly/1JzHs2v

NHS scientist training programme:
http://bit.ly/1tZIE32

Career ideas (Prospects):
www.prospects.ac.uk/options_biology.htm

Biochemistry careers information:
www.biochemistry.org/Education/Highereducation.aspx

General science careers information:
www.futuremorph.org/

For more information visit www.biochemistry.org